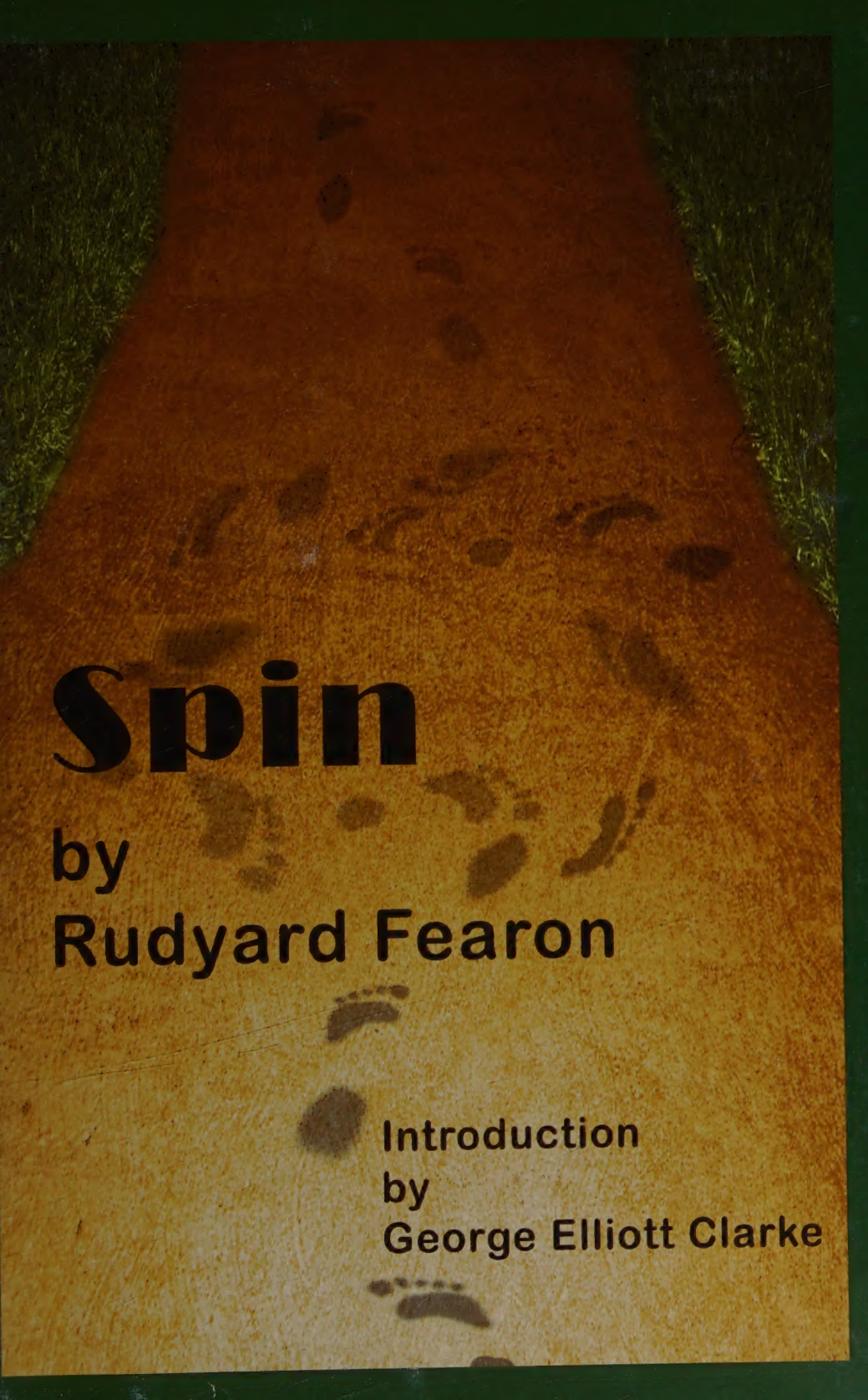
Spin
by
Rudyard Fearon
Introduction
by
George Elliott Clarke

Dun

(4)

Spin

for Hilary
thanks for your
support & love
Richard Tiers
May 24/2005

Spin

A New Book of Poetry

&

Free Soil

From the Poetry CD-ROM

by

Rudyard Fearon

RWF Publishing • Toronto • Canada

2004

RWF Publishing

www.rudyardfearon.com

rwfpublishing@yahoo.com

Spin

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ISBN 0-9688679-1-X (pbk.)

Free Soil

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ISBN 0-9688679-0-1 (CD-ROM)

Library and Archives Canada
Cataloguing in Publication

Fearon, Rudyard, 1953-

Spin : a new book of poetry ; &, Free soil : from the poetry CD-ROM / by Rudyard Fearon.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-9688679-1-X

I. Title. II. Title: Free soil.

PS8561.E22S64 2004

C811'.6 C2004-904259-9

Contents

ix Acknowledgements
x Biography
xiii Introduction by George Elliott Clarke

Spin

3 Spin
4 The Rain / Pop Pop
5 Lilacs / No Gloves
6 The Call / Red Letters
7 If I Only Knew / Tin Cans
8 Home
9 Graffiti Walls / Dig
10 Time Marches On Me / Cobweb
11 Shadows / A Lie
12 Childhood / Worry
13 The Corner / Anonymous
14 Me Wife Deh Foreign / The Church
15 Come to Jamaica / My Little Hole
16 Siloney
18 Ode to Trinidad
19 Tin Soldiers / The Ironfist
20 The Dance
22 Wicked an' Deadly
23 Ready
24 Rebel Man / The Blackman
25 African God
26 Fryin' Pon' / Hip Hop
27 Flies

28 Wind-Dream / Laws of Man
29 The Edge
30 Black Bench / Tea Party
31 This Is My Poem
32 The Echo
33 Egg / Butterfly
34 Silence
35 Salesman / Talk
36 Courtesy / Relics
37 Sixpence / A Shilling
38 Dreaming Man
39 Nightmare / The Surface
40 I Will Not Die
41 Man of Fantasy / Oh Little One
42 Someone / The Mirror
43 Write a Poem / Fading
44 Red / Big Breasts
45 Dead Men / Women
46 Camouflage
47 I Love a Rainbow
48 Fallin'
49 The Closed Door / The Circle
50 War / The City
51 Premature / The Wall
52 My Friend
53 The Oka Affair / Final
54 Unnoticed / Shadowman
55 The Poet / My Name
56 The Hunter

57 The Darkness / Still the Same
58 My Sunday / Self
59 Climbing / Resting
60 Weed / Rising Star
61 A Mermaid's Song
62 The Crutch / The Carving
63 Snow / Wild Horses
64 Thorns / Missing
65 A Moment / Spring Fever
66 Higher Heights

Free Soil

71 Free Soil
72 Culture Street / Tourism
73 Aching Feet
74 The Light
75 The Accident
76 Sleeping Tank / Dead Poem
77 Rain Clouds
78 Ten Little Toes / Dreams
79 Mulatto (Nigger Charlie Came)
80 Where Do I Fall
81 Wild Daffodils / Freedom
82 Revenge / Logic
83 Sequence / Tavern Talk
84 Talk Dirty / Noise
85 Shy / My Wife Left Me
86 Bastard Children
87 Booze Can

88 400 Years Waiting
90 Bussing / Tea
91 The News
92 Bridal Gown / A Kiss
93 Since I Met You / Strangers
94 White Sheets / Potholes
95 Between the Trees / Tropical Trees
96 Ghetto Man
97 Fathers
98 Maxi
99 Me Basket
100 Jail House / My House
101 The Attic / The Rat
102 Times Are Changing
103 Rotting
104 Red River
105 Not To Be Obedient
106 See De Gun Deh
108 Stop De Masquerade / The Masqueraders
109 The Beggar
110 Little Elaine / Atop the Hill
111 Vision
112 Justice / Surreal
113 Maze
114 Catching Up
115 Confused
116 Wedding Band
117 Image
121 Dictionary of Jamaican Dialect
124 Phrases & Idioms

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my daughter
Crystal, who endlessly typed and edited,
Andrew Lee, my friend and architect of the
CD-ROM *Free Soil* and this book *Spin*,
Wasyl Sydorenko and the resources of
Hypertext Plus, and all those that
space will not allow me to name.

Most of all, I want to thank my family,
especially my late grandmother, Imogene Fearon,
for the nurturing that made all this possible.

I would also like to acknowledge
Myna Wallin for the cover photo of me.

Rudyard Fearon
September 2004

Rudyard Fearon

Rudyard is named for the poet Rudyard Kipling. He admits the influence of Claude McKay, the great Jamaican poet, and of Robert Frost. Yet his poetry is more than just a link to his birthplace in Clarendon, Jamaica. Fearon's poetry is imbued with universal truths, the struggle for equality and justice, themes of racial violence, and memories of his childhood. These are not simple reminiscences, but rather a blending of paradoxes, of the old with the new.

Since 1974, Rudyard Fearon has lived in Toronto, Canada. At the centre of this most multicultural city lies the University of Toronto. It is here that Fearon has worked since 1982 at the Robarts Library. And it is here that he has read volumes of literature, poetry and criticism while in search of his artistic ideal.

Fearon has been very active in Toronto's poetic community. Often published, Rudyard Fearon does not confine his art to the page. His reading of his poetry goes far beyond simple recitation. To see his performance is to witness the poet within. He will spend hours considering the subtleties of a word or the meaning of a title and then explode on stage with supreme energy. Fearon encompasses the spirit of island and mainland with wild enthusiasm and cool precision. His audio CD-ROM, *Free Soil*, has been so well received by reviewers that the texts of these poems have been included in *Spin*, his first printed book.

Introduction

by

George Elliott Clarke

There's a New Poetry, So Let Bro' Fearon Up and Knock Out its Foes!

Rudyard Fearon is that immaculately suave, consummately ageless, and right-on, seditious citizen-poet always haunting the shadowed fringes of recitals, where the elements of any excellent verse must find their most brilliant meaning and their most enlightened audience. Approach him, and he arrests you with a smile that is Ellingtonian gentility itself, for his acknowledgement reflects respect for those who respect *Poetry*. Gracing the podium, he stands before the microphone like a natural philosopher, cool, elegant, and hip, to announce each poem like a judgment. His words are incisive; their wisdom cuts deep—like a scalpel, surgical, medicinal... You don't feel your *stigmata* until it's too late.

Yes, Fearon is fearless. His spare lyrics got no time for mush and bullshit. His Muse, as exacting as X-acto blades, utilizes the sheer terrorism of facts. Pointedly, his haiku-honed, haiku-honest poems are aimed—yessirree—at your head, your gut, your heart. Not to harm, but to heal.

Being an Afro-Caribbean-Canadian poet, Fearon indulges the African genius for aphorism. Like Calypsonians, Dub poets, High-Life bards, and Hip Hop rhymers, Fearon wants his wisdom vocalized and acted upon. In the Diasporic African *ars poetica*, the word always gotta have flesh and the flesh always gotta have style. While Yeats questioned whether you can tell the dancer from the dance, from a Black perspective—or "thang"—the poet ain't worth spit if he or she can't poeticalize,

I mean, *perform*. Fearon honours this scary, sumptuous aesthetic. So, he's also cut a Spoken Word album, *Free Soil* (2001).

Scholars debate whether orality belongs in the Academy of *Poetry*. Some say "yea," others, "nay." But this quarrel is *so* over: check the Hebraically articulate, Arabic-algebraically-complex, and logically Africanized streets, where *post-modern* is oral, urbanity is plural, and *Poetry* matters, lives, as graffiti, zines, TV shows, MP3 songs, web pages, and urgent slang. Here—where we *be*—*Poetry* must speak and sing like never before, if it would have audience, influence, *resonance*. Check also the exemplars of the empowered and empowering linguistic groove: Lillian Allen, Anthony "Nth Digri" Bansfield, Wendy "Motion" Braithwaite, Afua Cooper, Clifton Joseph, Oni "The Haitian Sensation" Joseph, Dwayne Morgan, Andrea Thompson...

Fearon is at home in this galaxy. His theory is his praxis. He sets down on paper whatever upsets him; he sets off nerve-wracking insight in poems voiced like declarations of war. His poetry has the exceptional clarity of black song and is ultimately as intoxicating. Unlike his namesake, Rudyard Kipling, he sets his voice/verse in the service of veracity and power, your—our—own.

Pour these verses into your brain. If it's blocked up, don't worry: here you got oil and fire that will purge and cleanse. Heed the man's words: "break the damn silence!"

George Elliott Clarke
E.J. Pratt Professor of Canadian Literature
University of Toronto

Spin

Spin

Spin the coin

Nothing else between us

The Rain

I cannot say, for sure,
Why Love hasn't rained
On this old heart of mine,
Nor can i say its parched seedlings
Would be susceptible to growth...
But i will till the soil, once again,
Sprinkle it with man-made fertility
Then spread, open wide—like Sahara

And wait for the rain to come.

Pop Pop

On this fertile ground
I will scatter my seed.

Pop

Pop pop

Grow seeds grow.

Lilacs

Lilacs are blooming in the fields today.
My Love has pledged: I do.

Lilacs are blooming in the fields today.
They bloomed not for me.

No Gloves

I came
With no gloves.

I shook hands
With you
Because
That's what I came
To do.

The Call

I must close my ears
to the drums.

Drums, the warriors are long dead
and these chains are too heavy on my legs.

Drums, the warriors are long dead.

Red Letters

This is my blood.
I will not waver.

I will drip
red
letters
To the next generation.

If I Only Knew

If I only knew
When to stop stop stop
Where the sun shone shone shone
And the shadow ran ran ran.

If I only knew
When to stop—
I would not be here
Etched in darkness.

tin cans

this red earth
that makes
tin cans

is my blood.

Home

Who are these bodies
That float like mist of smoke.
I must know them.
Come, my load is heavy.
I, too, long to be free.

(ii)

The sun is rising, rising again.
I am not up, still not up.
I dream: A puff of smoke
Floating high. I am the clouds.

(iii)

I see myself clearly now.
I hear my heart beating drums.
I shall not return.
Clouds embrace me.
I shall not return.

Graffiti Walls

So much is ephemeral
In this city of din.
The walls talked.

So much is pastoral
In this field of corn.
Silence is the birds and bees.

Dig

Today
I found a broken bottle.

Tomorrow
I will dig a bit more.

?

Time Marches On Me

Time time
Marches on me.
Run run
Nowhere to hide!
Time time
Marches on me.
Slow slower
Time marches on me.

Wrinkled, greyed...
Time, you wretch
You have caught me!
Time time
Time marches on me.

Cobweb

Look what
the cobweb
gathered:
a man
and a chair.

How they used to rock.

shadows

the shadows falling.
the darkness closing in.

no wish to fight

the ending.

A Lie

Today
I will tell a lie.
Will smile
Won't cry.
Will smile
Won't cry.

Today
For awhile
I will tell a lie.

Childhood

I have had many things.
Loved many things.
Kept many things.
Lost the ones I loved the most.

I have had many things.
Loved many things.
Kept many things.
Lost many things.

Worry

When I was young
I ran with the deer.

Now I am old.

I worry
About the deer.

The Corner

I have turned the corner
And now the corner has turned me.
I can see the sinking sun.
I have travelled long and far.
I am tired: bring me the night.

Let me sink sink sink
Into the sinking sun.

Anonymous

Never heard the name?
The same
Game
We're in, together
The better—
Loosen the fetter
Let us walk
And talk
In a ballpark.

The same game?
Remember the name.

Me Wife Deh Foreign

Me wife deh foreign.
Me wife a sen' fe me.
It a go ten years now
Me a wait fe she.

She sen' me papers...
About five years now,
Sey me fe consent
And renew we vow.

So me consent—sign one big X
And post de papers fe she.
Now me just a wait
A wait fe she.

The Church

Come let us go down
To the church.

It is burning!

Come let us foresee
For ourselves
The afterlife.

Come to Jamaica

Come to Jamaica.
Beautiful Jamaica.
Land of wood and water.
Land of sea and sun.

Stately mountains...
Falling rivers...

Come,
Come to Jamaica!
Beautiful Jamaica!

Land of desert
In a native's eyes.

my little hole

i'm gonna slide
back in my little hole
where the night shines
and everything is familiar.

i'm gonna
block
the day
out.

Siloney

Lawd me so lonely,
Ever since dat gal Siloney
Lef' me, me so sad
Me soon gone mad.

Me love de little gal so,
Dat if me only know
She would a left me fe long teeth John—
Me would a put on de ring long time pon har han'.

De bwoy face so long an' ugly!
Him is the dead stamp a Mass Zekel cubby.
But just because him hab money
Me lose me sweet Siloney.

Yessiday, me se' dem drive up in a him long car,
A go drink in a Miss Lena rum bar,
Wid him long teeth a grin—
But little do him know how fe me heart a sin!

So me sey, "Siloney, me dear,
Come mend your lover's heart right here;
Fah me poor life is in darkness
Ever since yu lef' me in loneliness."

Me never se' nothin' like dis before!
De gal slam de car door!
... Den 'tep pass me like miss lady bud
An' heed none to me wud.

Shame wrinkle in a me face—
Me heart mad fe jump out a place—
Everybody bust out a laugh
De way de gal brush me off!

So me heart leapt, so me temper boil.
Me nuh know how me nuh ketch up like matches an' kerosene oil...
But me dig me head in a me love
An' pray to God above.

Me sey, "Faadah next to yu ah love Siloney best
And now she has put me to de test,
But faadah, do let she come back in a me arms
Fah ah can't bear fe know sey... she transform!"

Ode to Trinidad

(1976)

Trini bwoy ran first.
Trini gal won Miss Universe.
Trinidad is on the move.
Trinidad high in the groove.

Trinidad so rich with oil—
Forty cents a gallon me chile!
Williams, a watch fe de nation.
Me a foreign a watch fe Immigration!

Now Trinidad a lend money,
While fe me pocket here empty.
Trinidad a rub cheek to cheek—
Me here a play hide an' seek.

Tin Soldiers

Outside
tin soldiers
armed,
play mas'

on massa door.

inside
massa dance

fe éncor'.

the ironfist

the
ironfist

crumbled
like clay

into dust.

The Dance

agony, ecstasy

the drum...
the drum beat
moanin'.

the guitar...
the guitar beat
risin'.

dance babylon,
dance,
the music
invitin', excitin'.

listen,
the drum...
the drum beat
moanin'.

the guitar...
the guitar beat
risin'.

agony, ecstasy

dance, babylon
dance.
the music
invitin', excitin'.

listen, babylon
listen...
hear the cries
of my people.

it is not music...

it is a volcano,
burstin' loose!

Wicked an' Deadly

I was lookin' for wuk
When the whiteman smile
And han' me the white stuff.
I thought i was in luck
For i was bruk.
A snort an' a puff
An' man it wasn't enuf.

It wicked an' deadly
The way flies tek me mek bed
An' the way me eyes
A fall back in a me head.

It wicked an' deadly
It wicked an' deadly
It wicked an' deadly

Man, it wicked an' deadly.

Ready

We're ready
To cross
The ocean.
We got oars.
We got boats.

We see
The waves standing!
We see
The mountain rising!

We got oars.
We got boats.

children children.
yes, Papa.
where've you been?
over the ocean, Papa.

rebel man

i'm
the rebel man.

they say
i shot
Justice
clean dead

'cause Justice
ain't on my side.

The Blackman

Beware
The Blackman.

He is still
Asleep.

African God

Me nuh know
Mek yu wicked so.
Me nuh know
Mek yu wicked so.

Tief me from me African yard
And tek me abroad.
Tell me tings me nuh understan'.
Tell me dat me not a human!
Tun round an' gimme your god?
Dem somethin' deh mek me go mad mad mad.
Dem sinthin' deh mek me go bad bad bad.

Me nuh know
Mek yu wicked so.
Me nuh know
Mek yu wicked so.

Put me in a slavery.
T'ink dat a bravery?
One day yu'll meet my African God!
Dem somethin' deh will mek Him go mad mad mad.
Dem sinthin' deh will mek Him go bad bad bad.

Me nuh know
Mek yu wicked so.
Me nuh know
Mek yu wicked so...

Fryin' Pon'

I'm a fish
A very small fish
Swimmin'
In a fryin' pon'.
My aqua—
Hell is hot!
Seethin' simmerin'
Burnin' hot.

Tic tic
Toc toc.

hip hop

hip
hop
hip hoppers
hip
hopping
over the fence!

hip hip...

Flies

Hungry tormented
Swat-scarred flies
Buzz buzz
Buzz down
On dead life.

Watch them
Watch them.

Watch them
Watch them.

Just watch them
Feast in anger.
Just watch them
Feast in anger.

Wind-Dream

High
in the wind.
I'm gonna
hang my Black Dreams
high
in the wind.
an' the wind will blow an' blow
an' my Black Dreams
hung high in the wind

will flutter, flutter, flutter...

Laws of Man

... the laws of man
are hard to understand.

kill a man
they call a doctor.

killed by a man
they throw you in the gutter.

The Edge

I have seen
the victim.

I have seen
the murder.

I have seen
the witnesses.

The eyes heard.
The ears saw.
And the law upheld.

I have been there.

Have you ever been there...
on the edge of violence?

black bench

i sit
on the black bench
watch the Whites
pass me by.

i sit on the black bench
and wonder...
wonder why.

Tea Party

... An old man
Died here yesterday
And no one
Knew his name.

An old man
Died here, anyway,
And no one knew
He was here.

this is my poem

this is my poem
and i write it
anyhow.
i write it
long.
i write it
short.

i write it
anyhow.

(ii)

this is my song
and i sing it
anyhow.
i sing it
high.
i sing it
low.

i sing it
anyhow.

the echo

the parrot says
i shouldn't leave
in much the same way
i told my girl friend
she shouldn't leave.

i am standing in the hallway
staring at a troubled face
staring at a puzzled face
in the mirror; the parrot in the cage.
the apartment is empty.
the parrot thinks otherwise.
it chatters, it flutters
as if nothing is wrong.
i pick up the suitcase
and the cage, say good-bye
to the wall; the parrot says

you shouldn't leave
you shouldn't leave
you shouldn't leave

egg

the morning
cracks
open
like an egg.

cock-a-doodle-do.

Butterfly

Had
my mom
caterpillar
the way
they do

then
I would be
a butterfly.

silence

silence
listen to
silence

silence
nothing said
nothing heard

silence
silence
silence

break the damn silence!

bang
bang
bang

broken silence
echoing, echoing
into silence.

Salesman

At the half-opened door,
I offered a set
of crest-white teeth
And a tutored face
cashmered with a smile.

BANG!

talk

a wandering duck:
quack quack quack...

Courtesy

When i'm dead
As all men must be,
I'll wait on you
The way i always do.
"Yes, please sir."
"No, please sir."
"T'ank you, please sir."
"Comin' up, please sir."

When you're dead
As all men must be,
I'm the one
With sunglasses on
Waitin' to greet you.

Relics

It didn't make sense
At all...
Parading the dead!
The dead
Must remain dead.
And the living
Carry on living
Until they are dead.

Sixpence

I once had a sixpence
And I lost it.
I told my grandson about the sixpence
That I lost.
He checked the shiny coin
In my hand and said,
"Grandpa you really lost it..."

But what is he to say...
After all, he never had it.

A Shilling

I came
To earn
A shilling

Not fallen pennies
From the hole
In your pocket.

Dreaming Man

Dreaming Man
Your dreams
Are long gone.
The night wind
Collared them
One bitter cold night
And took them
To the dead sea.

Dreams are precious
To the sea;
It's like memories
To an old man.

So Dreaming Man
Wake a while,
Your dreams are not up
Riding with the stars
But
At the bottom
Of the dead sea
Rustling with the weeds.

nightmare

the nightmare gone.
the darkness cleared.

thoughts rinsed in cold water

the creature...
a pet
to pat on the head.

the garbage, piled,
awaits the refuse man.

be mindful of the creature
for he is the forerunner.

The Surface

There is something
Lying beneath
That cool, serene surface
That I must disturb

With a pebble.

I Will Not Die

I felt the hot
Digging pain
As the bullets
Invaded my body.
I ran
A lifetime
In a single step;
Drew one last breath
Hurled one last profanity,
As the thunder
Exploded in my head.

But I would not die.
No, I would not die.
Tired. I rest.
Lay with frozen eyes
Staring up into heaven.

Man of Fantasy

When the years were young
And a child, a child
And a dream, a dream
I housed myself
A dream.

Then a child
And like a child
Drawn by a child's fantasy
I lay guard
By the door of a child's dream.

And fell asleep.

Oh Little One

Asleep,
So quiet, so still.

Beauty rare.
Beauty deep.

Someone

Someone faded is posing
On my vanity.
grin grin grin
Dad, who is he?
His eyes his teeth his grin
Mom, who is he?
pull pull pull
Someone is pulling
At me.
tell tell tell
Mirror, mirror who is he?

The Mirror

The mirror

f
e
l
l

as i was looking

in.

Write A Poem

I get angry
With myself
And blow
The silence
That is me.

Tell a few jokes.
Ponder the fellow
That laughs with me.

Write a few poems
Line by line
Quiz the fellow
Who wants to be me.

Fading

I peered
in
the turmoil
of a fading light

and found myself.

Red

I sit amongst three ladies
In red.

The tablecloth
In red.
The cigarette box
In red.
The drinks
In red.

The bills to pay
And all in red.

Big Breasts

I love those big breasts.

I wonder
When those big breasts
Start to sag

Will I still love those big breasts?

dead men

look in my eyes,
she said.
i looked
deep.

i saw men...
dead men
frolicking
on angry waves.

i ran.

women

women
are such beautiful
creatures.

i admire
them from

a distance.

Camouflage

A black butterfly,
With the wind,
Flew in my garden
One bright summer day.

Flittin' and flirtin',
From flower to flower,
Started a dance
With my lily white rose.

A black butterfly,
My lily white rose,
Blendin', camouflagin'
One bright summer day.

... Caught my eyes
And flew away.

I Love a Rainbow

I love, I love
the little rivulets of love
that rush through your smile;
the little hi's and little bye's
that tell me you're shy.

Oh! I love, I love
the little ringlets of diamonds
that sparkle in your eyes;
the little might's and little maybe's
that tell me good-bye.

Oh! I love, I love
the poignancy, the charm,
that graced your footsteps;
the little glances, romances
that dared me to follow.

Oh! Betwixt the in-betweens
of the hi's and bye's,
I love a rainbow
in another man's sky.

fallin'

deep
in my thoughts,
i can hear you
my sister.

callin'
fallin'
callin'
fallin'

your hot words
burnin'
with desire
reachin'

d
e
e
P

The Closed Door

He burst into the room. Not looking at us. Feet shuffled.
I hurried over to him—fake smile in place.
"How's life treating you, Jack?"
The music stopped. Feet shuffled out.
"She's not here, Jack!"
I edged between him and the closed door.
"Honest... she's not."
Silence. The closed door.

The Circle

Draw the line

That carved circle
Won't let us
In.

Draw the line.

We must not
Follow it
Round and round.

War

We fight for equality.
There is no equality.

We fight for justice.
There is no justice.

We fight for love.
There is no love.

We fight for peace.
There is no peace.

We fight fight and fight and fight
We fight for war.

And there is war war war and war.

the city

in this god-damn
man-made city,
i can't even find
a rock.

and the messenger is leaving.

Premature

There is laughter made
and the joke is yet untold.
Tears cried
and feelings yet unhurt.

There is a song sung
and the singer yet to sing.
Speech made
and the speaker yet to speak.

Things done,
and the time yet to come.

the wall

brick
by brick
lets tear the wall
down.

a whisper, a whisper...

brick
by brick
let's build the wall
again.

my friend

... still don't know
why you did this to me.

... a wanderer
i took you in.
gave you warmth.
gave you friendship.

... still don't know
why you did this to me.

you traded me.
i gave you tobacco.
you gave me firewater.

you put me out
in the cold.
i drink firewater
to keep me warm.

still don't know
why you did this to me...

The Oka Affair
(1990)

Come forth with your guns
And ammunitions...

The dead
Are rising up
In the graveyards.

Final

At the party
I will invite no guest.
I will be courteous.

I will play no music.
I will be considerate.

I will serve no drinks.
I will be generous.

At the end
I will bid no good-bye.

I will be final.

Unnoticed

The day is crawling
Into his nutshell.
The night from hers.

Except for my shadow
I'm passed

Unnoticed.

shadowman

i know
the shadow.

that man
i do not know.

the poet

the inmates
at the looney bin
hail the poet

"comrade!"

my name

pencil my name
on a piece of paper
and speak no word of me
for I am well represented.

The Hunter

Like a victorious hulk
I spread the meat
On the bonfire.
Under a dark sky
We dine.
Coyly, you quiz
And I spill the beans.
You must have seen the hurt
Gathering in my smiling eyes.
We talk and talk
As the night ebbs to an end.
When the sun rises,
My lowly friend,
And the call to hunt
Is near—
For the hunt
Must be hunted.
Feign no deceit:
I am only a hunter.

the darkness

through the canopy of trees,
the sun peeped.
the fox could not see me.

i approached, cunningly, on its flank—
the silent trees bore witness.

down on all fours,
i crawled closer... closer to the animal.
then at the boundary where animals meet

i mounted the rifle.
pulled the trigger,
and heard it pull the darkness.

still the same

at night
no matter how hard
i try
chasing dreams
up in the sky—
everything is still the same—

they run away.

my sunday

barren
as the desert sand

my sunday
is here

and no one
to pray to.

Self

I have shed
some skin.

A few hairs
here.

A few hairs
there.

I am fast becoming
that picture on the wall.

climbing

i'm
climbing
to the
top
and i won't
drop.
climbing
to the
top
and i won't

drop.

resting

all my living days
spent working;
i hope when they
lay me down
my dead days
will be spent

resting.

weed

i am
the grave
with
no name
no birth date
no headstone.

i am
the mound of weed
you trampled on.

Rising Star

Remove the banner,
And bait
The rising star
In.

When hooked,
Pull in.
Pin it
On the darkest night
For it is significant.

A Mermaid's Song

They are back, mom
They are back!
They are dangling nets, mom
They dangle cozy nets.

come on home
pretty mermaid
come on home
won't you come on home

They are singing, mom
They sing sad songs.
Mom, why do they sing
Sad songs?

come on home
pretty mermaid
come on home
won't you come on home

Cozy nets, mom
Cozy nets...
You are making huge waves...
Mom, why do you make huge waves?

the crutch

take away the crutch
from the crutch-up man
for he is standing,
standing long.

give it to the youth
for he is yet to stand.

the carving

i have made a cut
on this polished wood.

look

a cut has been made
on that polished wood.

snow

i was new
and so was
the snow
befuddled
i went out
and caught a flake
took it
in
then began
the examination

not wanting
to give up
its secrets
to a stranger
it melted
in my hand

Wild Horses

These wild horses
Running round
In my head.
I must harness them
Before they lay
Down dead.

thorns

love me,
i am a thorn

and i grow
amongst your roses.

don't neglect me.

prune me.
nourish me.

let me grow.

in the evening
when the sun fades

love me,
i am your Rose.

missing

that man
that woman
that girl

missing

that boy

a moment

for a moment
you look at me
and i see
the innermost parts
of you.

for a moment
you slip away.

spring fever

uncoat bodies
out with the spring

scurrying

like hungry chickens
driven crazy
by the call of corn.

Higher Heights

From across the room the little tape recorder sang:

I'm feelin' high... so high...

Rastaman Tom perched on the half-broken chair
And bobbed away his head into frenzy.

A long time now me nuh feel so nice...

His long locks swayed like gaunt branches.
A great cloud huffed from his nostrils,
Engulfing the little room in sweet aroma.
He coughed, he sighed, he bobbed.
"Good weed, mon, good weed."
The self to the self.
He took a long draw on the huge spliff
Illuminating the sparsely furnished room
That he called home:
A cot, a chair
His worldly possessions.
Tonight he had spliffs to raise him
To higher heights;
Above the clouds
Away from Babylon.
"Blessin'!"
The herb penetrated his head.
The little tape recorder stopped singing.
He had stopped hearing.

He had left the world.
Somewhere floating, floating...
Mind, body, disembodied
Feeling nice, real nice...

He didn't hear the knock.
He didn't hear the great disturbance
When the door flew off
Its hinges.
He didn't feel the arms of steel
Lifting him.
He didn't feel the boots
Making contact.

He was nice, too nice
In his little world
To feel earthly sensations.

In jail they mouthed words at him
But he could not hear them.

He heard, he heard
The little tape recorder, Marley-like,
In his head
And he sang sweetly along,

"I'm feelin' high...
so high..."

Free Soil

Free Soil

I'm gonna remove this tap
and let the river plunge in;
settled deep in dry—
it shall be my scar.

Culture Street

Ain't there a visible kin
on Culture Street?

I'm longing to rap
chat
way back in that ole dialect.

Pardon me please, sir,
But... have you a turban to spare?

Tourism

Pretty monkey dolls
bow their heads
and pray...

Please Lord!
don't let the snow-men
take us away.

aching feet

so far to go
for i yet cannot see
the sun.
aching feet
is tired
so tired
it can hardly
break the stones—
but it must not grind
to a halt.
it must move
keep on moving
grind them stones
stone by stone
and leave the dust
behind.

the light

... corn golden, cotton white.
Sleep, lull me to bed.
body tired, mind weak.
rest rest rest.
stop. I cannot go on.
Darkness, snuff this Light.
rest rest rest.
heavy sand, gnarled feet.
rest. we must rest.
the bugle calls. you must not flee.
lie with me.
we alone; buried in the sand.

the accident

it was not the accident
that scared me.

the twisted metal
wrapped me.

the gasping lights
that kept dying
in my head.

it was the wound
left open.

the shrouded faces
the scalpelled hands
that probed, tinkered,

sewed.

sleepin' tank

i am
a sleepin' tank

ready to roll

bull-doze
your castles down

... plant trees.

sleepin' tank?

just wake me...

dead poem

i woke up
this morning
with a poem
in my head
and before i could
write it...
the poem went dead.

dead poem
in my head.

rain clouds

... and I remembered
only the beginning
and the rain clouds
hanging low
and the rain clouds
hanging low.
flashing lights wailing sirens
and the stench of violence
filled the air.
angry rocks flying
crashing windows
batons swinging
breaking bones
and someone swore
"fuckin' nigger!"
and the shadows fell
with the rain.
and I remembered
only the beginning
and the rain clouds
hanging low
and the rain clouds
hanging low.

Ten Little Toes

The man smiled.
Have you seen him?
Yes!
And the laughter unfolded.
Ten little black toes
Tip-toeing on snow white ground.

Dreams

White man! White man!
I am now living
Your dreams.

I walk like you.
I talk like you.

And I know one day
You will find a way
To make me

Look like you.

Mulatto (Nigger Charlie Came)

Up drift a black cloud
Over the border
From southern town
Nigger Charlie came
Settled in a white town.
Met white Mary
And the whole town frowned.
The women gossiped—
The men swore!
Nigger Charlie left—
Couldn't take no more.
And neighbours didn't mind
'Til they found
Half of him left behind.

Where Do I Fall

I am halfway
between black and white,
my father a nigger,
my mother a slut...
so they tell me.
I am Right and Wrong
bridging the gap
between good and evil.
In my neighbourhood
I play safe—
I sit on the fence.
When push comes to shove,
tell me Mommy, tell me Daddy,
where do I fall?

Wild Daffodils

A bouquet of yellow daffodils
sprouted the mound of earth
they covered my daddy with...
growing wild
the way my daddy did.

Freedom

If i had the key,
i would release
all the prisoners
of the world.
i would tell them,
"go sow your seeds,
multiply!"

Then i would quickly
lock myself in;
and laugh at
freedom.

Revenge

They talk revenge:

an eye
for an eye.

a tooth
for a tooth.

bargain...

me for you?

Logic

I am
a logical man.

When one and one
is not two

And three from four
is not one
anymore,

I will abandon you,
logically.

Sequence

Yesterday
I laughed myself
To sleep.

Today
I cried myself
Awake.

Since I am not
A man of repetition,

What will I do
Tomorrow?

tavern talk

a linen
of lies

lined my partner's words

but i sipped

as i was sipping beer,

tasteless but satisfying.

Talk Dirty

I will wait
Till the sun belly-up;
Then talk dirty
To the priest.
I will drag him
Haggardly by the crutch
Up the hills, down in the fountain
Betwixt Rose Marie's legs.
I will wait
Till he is limped and washed-up,
Then pointingly say
Look, God is dead!

Noise

They say
i am the quiet one.

... they do not hear the noise
my thoughts make.

Shy

Shy at heart,
I focused my vision
Not at her tightening bosom
Nor at her half-cocked thighs,
But at her crude-shaped toes
Until the zipper was down
At a stand-point
And there was no escape.

My Wife Left Me

My wife left me.

Her friends say
She was kind.
It was long overdue.

My wife left me.

My friends say
She was unkind.
She should have left

My mind too.

bastard children

bastard children
in a foreign land
where do they belong?
in the cane fields
in the banana walks
in the cotton fields
back in the jungle?
lost children work your butt off
low wages is better than no wages
a flat is better than a hut
move your butt; don't chat back,
be good; you may live in the neighbourhood,
don't complain so much; be a sport.
bastard children
in a foreign land
your surrogate mama
is better than no mama at all.

Booze Can

On a snowy night
Underneath the ground
Fun-loving, transplanted Jamaicans
Mouthed "bumbo cloth"
And hammered dominoes
Into wooden tables.
A dread transfixed
In a darkened corner,
Sucked deep on a spliff,
Flashed his dreadlocks
And shouted, "Jah Rastafari!"

On the white surface
A multitude of cops—
Some playing soldiers
Some with chips on their shoulders
And guns that reached the sky—

Moved in for the kill.

400 Years Waiting

Sittin' on de corna
waitin' fah massa.
sittin' on de corna
waitin' fah ansa.

knives ready
guns ready
bombs ready.

sittin' on de corna
waitin' fah massa.
sittin' on de corna
waitin' fah ansa.

see massa deh!

knives ready
guns ready
bombs ready
all ready!

hold fire!
hold fire!
massa black...
massa black...

sittin' on de corna
waitin' fah massa.
sittin' on de corna
waitin' fah ansa.

waitin' fah ansa...

Bussing

In school
Where they bussed
Them
The white chalk
Ponders
The problem
On a black board.

Tea

Master!
The servants
Are now rebelling.

Should i
Bash them!
Smash them!
Squash them!

Or should i
Just ask them

To tea...

the news

a wannabe somebody
filled with rage, hurt and wants
scribbled in my thoughts.
"please, make me somebody."
i, a nobody, wrote back,
i don't know how.
enraged it etched
"then follow my lead!"
i weak and empty...
what was i supposed to do?
so together we swam
the raging river
thought in thought
over the precipice

and made the news.

bridal gown

take me
over the threshold
that i might walk
on the bridal gown.

pearly white
bridal gown
i have come
to walk on you.

A Kiss

When she decided,
I told her
I care.
Sipped lemon juice
From her lips;
Washed her face
With a smile.

Ripened love hanging,
I plucked a kiss
To seal
A wedding vow.

Since I Met You

Since i met you
I can't help feeling blue—
Too many times apart
Is breaking my heart.
At nights when i'm alone
I get this urge to phone,
To say i miss you—
To hear you say: I miss you too.
Before i fall asleep at nights,
I hug my pillow tight—
Pretending it is you
I whisper: I love you.

strangers

if a kiss
embodied love,
kiss me tonight
when i am asleep;
in waking hours
we must remain strangers
that must never meet.

White Sheets

I must learn
to spread
my white sheets
out in the sun:
wash them, bleach them,
spread them out
to dry.

When the sun
goes down:
fold them, crease them,
put them back
in the closet.

Potholes

Potholes potholes
wherever I go
potholes potholes

making life miserable.

between the trees

a long time ago
i used to climb
the coconut tree.
now my only child
called, "look daddy,
i climbed the maple tree."
i smiled at her,
she at me.

something passed
between the trees.

tropical trees

tropical trees
in a winterland
sprouting roots
where they don't belong.

uproot them
take them back
where they're from.

ghetto man

I'm a product of the ghetto.
I'm a ghetto man.
I crawled on all fours
to reach your high society
now you boot me out...
boot me out without sympathy.

I'm a ghetto man
the ghetto is in me;
you can take me from the ghetto
but you can't take the ghetto from me.

ghetto man, ghetto man
I'm a ghetto man
satta-ing on bended knees
and begging, begging for sympathy.

Fathers

All a dem want to get in a Joycy pants
But none a dem want to bear de consequence.
When name fe call: Dolphus! Johnny! Eric!
All a dem bawl: "nuh call fe me name!"
So pickney born without faadah:
Grandmaddah, aunt, uncle, cousin—but nuh faadah.
Joycy wash people dutty clothes.
Joycy clean people dutty floor.
Pickney grow big, hate school, tun bad—nuh faadah.
All kinda blame fall pon poor Joycy—nuh faadah.
Joycy wash people dutty clothes.
Joycy clean people dutty floor.
Pickney grow big, tek school, tun good.
Forward Dolphus, Johnny, Eric
Claim pickney look like dem...
Fathers.

Maxi

Lawd me tired fe tan up a dis ya bus 'top
An' it look like rain ago drop.
T'ank God, se a bus a crawl deh a come.
The driver gwan like a country him deh a drive cow.

Missis, me just ago enta in de crowd
When me hear a voice bawl out loud,
Me tun me yie an look up
In a face full a mek-up.

Me sey "gal wey wrong wid yu
No tell me sey fe go in a bus nu!"
She begin to tell me how pon har dress somadi 'tep
And if su much people never deh bout how she woulda wept.
Me laugh so tell
Me nuh know how me belly nuh bust like Mass Joseph well
Fe nuh sey Aunt Tina sore foot Mal
Suddenly tun sweet gal.

Me sey "look ya gal, me know oonu dry land
Tourist nuh like de rush,
Oonu nuh want oonu one frock fe get crush—
So mek yu nuh go tek taxi?
Fah in a dis yah hot day... wey yu a do in a maxi!"

Me Basket

Last Satiday me a come from market
Wid me bag in a me han an pon me head me basket.
To tell yu de truth me wasn't in a me good mood—
Fah cost-a-living shouldn't be so high; so high fe food!
Fe mek it worst one handcart bwoy nearly lick me light out—
Den wid him renk an feisty, tun round ask me
If me tink me can beat-out?
But if a did only lay me han pon de show-off,
Him dem wouldn't if an but fe write off!
Anyway, me go a de bus 'top an tek one bus partly full
When one conductress gal who face favor Mass Natty bull
Come tell me sey, "yu and your basket can't come in here!"
Me kindly sey, "Missis, tan tudy yah, me hab me fare!"
Eh, me coulda barely reach in
When one ooman start bout har stockin,
Den one nother one bout har corn,
And so one after another dem a gwan.
Fe me face get heby laka a lead
But me whol me long tongue in a me head
Till one ooman go hot-up me wrong part
When she sey, "All laka me fe drive in a handcart!"
Me couldn't bear it nuh more—
Me go a de back an look pon all a dem before
An from left to right begin to cuss
All a dem who a tek liberty wid me basket pon de bus!
An when a done salt an pepper dem so
Whey dem tun me nuh know—
But all me know me get one hellaba empty bus ride
Wid me foot dem cut ten an me basket a me side!

jail house

down here
in jail house
me, mouse and cockroach
keep company.

down here
we see the belly
of the boot—
and know our enemy!

my house

my house
is growing old.

in my house
spiders spin huge webs
and rats grow sharp nails.

The Attic

The attic
where i came from
now lies on the ground.
Time has been cruel:
it walks, never looks
where it is going,

never looks back.

the rat

take heed of me.

i am the rat
down from the attic

hungry and brave

searching for the trap.

Times Are Changing

I can see
the sun rising
in the west.

Mothers becoming
fathers, fathers becoming
mothers, sisters becoming
brothers, brothers becoming
sisters.

Yesterday becoming tomorrow
becoming today.
Times are changing.
God, are you changing too?

Rotting

I am rotting here
And there is no stench
No carcass
No hovering crow.

I am rotting here
And there is no flower
No hymn
No well-wisher.

And I have rotted
A thousand times over
And the world hasn't seen

And the world hasn't seen.

red river

there is a river
running
inside these veins.
blood red
angry river
running
inside these veins.
bubbling river
bursting
through these veins.
old river
haunting these veins.
pulsing river
old river
angry river
blood red river
where is my name?

Not To Be Obedient

This time... this time...
We will not be obedient!
The pointed-gun loaded
We will not turn it on ourselves
Nor will we walk those treacherous planks.

We have come too far... too far...
Died too many deaths
Martyred too many times.
This time armed, mentally,
We will not turn back.

Yes, we come again,
And not to be obedient!

see de gun deh

see de man deh
see de gun deh
see de man deh
see de gun deh.

de man an de gun
de gun an de man
sey dem a one
dem a one deh.

see de bullet deh
see de life deh
see de bullet deh
see de life deh.

de man an de gun
de gun an de man
sey dem a one
dem a one deh.

see de life a run deh
see de bullet a come deh
see de life a run deh
see de bullet a come deh.

de man and de gun
de life and de bullet
boow!
see de impact deh!
dem a one.

Stop De Masquerade

Come we kill Caribana
Stop de masquerade!
Come we kill Caribana
Stop de parade!

Come we kill Caribana
Stop de ban'!
Come we kill Caribana
Come we tek a stan'!

Come we kill Caribana
Stop de show!
Come we kill Caribana
Till some dollars flow!

The Masqueraders

We watch you
On your ego trip
Masquerading as our god.

We know who you are!

Our heads shall not bow
Our knees shall not bend
Our tongues shall not speak.

the beggar

crablike
the scrappy,
unkempt man
cornered me.
his pitch black eyes
rolled thunder
in my head;
lightening flashed
and maggots bared their fangs.
blood seeped
and the arrogant suit
that shielded me, wept.
then he stretched forth his hands,
released me.
i gave the beggar
what little change
i had;
then cursed the smile
that rose on his face.

Little Elaine

Little Elaine
With nothing better to do,
Sat on an idle bridge
Twiddling her toes.
Across the seas, miles away,
In an oval sphere,
Great minds intercede, interlock—
Planning to tear it down.

Atop the Hill

Time soon
Will chart
My burden down,
Then no more will I be
The frisky kid
Betwixt the valleys—
But the grazing goat
Atop the hill.

Vision

Do you feel me
tip-toeing
across the ceiling
of your mind?

Do you see me
spiralling
in the landscape
of your vision?

Do you hear me
echoing
in the wilderness
of your dreams?

Do you?
Do you?
Do you?

Justice

In the hallway
Of justice

I stand guard.

Rifle in hand,

I keep the gunman

Away.

surreal

i want to break
the edge:
bend it
dent it
like a collision.
roll it
bag it
take it to the forest.
dig the hole
plant it
grow it with the trees.

Maze

Show me the road
My brothers followed,
For I too, a thought,
Is lost in your maze.

... The road is dark
And littered with bones.
Tell me:
Did Martin Luther King
Follow this road?
Did Steve Biko
Follow this road?

Show me the road
And let me follow:
thump
thump
thump
thump...
Massa, are you following too?

Catching Up

They say
I'm a child
a child
a child

I'm creeping
creeping
creeping.

They say
I'm a man
a man
a man

I'm walking
walking
walking.

They say
I'm the devil
the devil
the devil

Now I'm running
running
running

running hard at them!

Confused

I am so confused.
I don't know
Who i am.

Look in the mirror
And i see a man.
Look in the mirror
And i see a man!

And i know
That's not
Who i am.

I am so confused...
And i don't give
A damn.

wedding band

the man behind the counter,
the eyes could not meet.

"forty."

the man waited and waited,
for the eyes.

"twenty-five."

they blinked... then drooped.
the pawn done,
the hand took the receipt
and fisted it.

it fisted back
14k wedding band!

image

read me
through the dark corners of your eyes;
you may find me
projecting your blind side.

search me
through the crowded zones
of your mind—
you may find me
not in the context
of your thoughts,
but slipping
on the tip of your tongue.

spit me
through your clenched teeth—
I may not fall
in a cushion of ears,
but with silence
upon your image.

Dictionary of Jamaican Dialect

&

Phrases and Idioms

Dictionary of Jamaican Dialect (Patois)

Ago – going to
Ah – I
An – and
Ansa – answer
Bruk – broke
Bud – bird
Bumbo cloth – a Jamaican curse word, loin cloth
Bwoy – boy
Corn – a hardening sore on the toe
Corna – corner
Country – rural areas
Cubby – young donkey
Cuss – curse
Dat – that
De – the
Dead stamp – identical
Deh – there
Dem – them
Den – then
Dis – this
Dutty – dirty
Enta – enter
Enuf – enough
Favor – look like
Faadah – father
Fah – for

Fe – to, for
Gal – girl
Gimme – give me
Grandmaddah – grandmother
Gwan – go on
Hab – have
Han – hand
Handcart – four-wheel trolley
Har – her
Heby – heavy
Hellaba – big
Hot-up – hurt
Immigration – immigration officer
Kinda – kind of
Laka – like
Lawd – Lord
Mass – mister
Massa – master
Mek – make
Mek-up – make-up
Mon – man
Nu – new
Nuh – no, don't
Ooman – woman
Oonu – you (plural)
Pickney – children
Pon – on, upon

Satiday – Saturday
Satta-ing – sitting
Seh – that
Sey – say
Sinthin' – something
Somadi – somebody
Spliff – marijuana joint
Su – so
Tan – stand
T'ank – thank
Tek – take
'Tep – step
Tief – thief, to steal
Tink – think
'Top – stop
Tun – turn, become
Wah – what
Wey – what
Whey – where
Whol – hold
Wid – with
Wud – word
Wuk – work
Yessiday – yesterday
Yie – eye
Yu – you

Phrases & Idioms

Fathers (p. 97)

Line 1, 4 all a dem – all of them
Line 1 get in a Joycy pants – want to have sex with Joycy
Line 2 none a dem – not one of them
Line 4 nuh call fe me name – don't call my name
Line 6, 9, 10 nuh faadah – no father
Line 9 tun bad – becomes worthless
Line 15 tek school – does well in school

Maxi (p. 98)

Line 1 tired fe tan up – tired to stand up
Line 2 rain ago drop – it is going to rain
Line 4 driver gwan like a country him deh a drive cow – driver driving a bus very slow, like a rural lad driving a cow
Line 9 gal wey wrong wid yu? – girl, what is wrong with you?
Line 15 sore foot Mal – low class girl
Line 17-18 dry land tourist – a native acting like a tourist
Line 21 maxi – a long dress

Me Basket (p. 99)

Line 5 nearly lick me light out – nearly collided

Line 6 renk an feisty – rude

Line 7 if me tink me can beat-out – reference to body work carried out on a dented vehicle

Line 9 if an but fe write off – reference to writing-off a badly damaged vehicle

Line 11 conductress gal – female bus-fare collector

Line 13 tan tudy ya – be quiet!

Line 16 one nother one – another one

Line 17 dem a gwan – they carry on, complain

Line 18 face get heby laka a lead – face gets heavy like lead, to get angry

Line 20 hot-up me wrong part – hurts my feelings

Line 26 salt an pepper dem – curse them

Line 29 me foot dem cut ten – sit cross-legged, poised

"His words are incisive; their wisdom cuts deep—like a scalpel, surgical, medicinal... You don't feel your stigmata until it's too late."

— Prof. George Elliott Clarke,
Governor General's
Award for Poetry, 2001

"I would characterize him as something of a minimalist... short, spare, and succinct. Rudyard makes every word and phrase count."

— Allan Briesmaster,
Poetry Editor,
Seraphim Editions

ISBN 0-968867

UB-631-361